

quite unknown to Jacques Bonhomme over the water. Lang-land thus describes him :—

Labourers that have no land to live on but  
their hands Deigned not to dine a-day on  
worts a night old. Penny ale will not do nor  
a piece of bacon, But if it be fresh flesh or  
fish fried or baked, And that hot-and-hot for  
the chill of their maw.

In such seasons, nothing would satisfy him—

And unless he be highly paid he will  
chide And bewail the time he was  
made a workman.

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He grieves against God and murmurs  
against reason And then curses he the King,  
and all his counsel after, For making such  
laws, labourers to grieve.

It is in the days of his good fortune that the satirist represents him as most seditious and most infuriated against the Statute of Labourers. But this prosperity, Langland proceeds to show, was subject to sudden mutations. Good times were succeeded by bad, and bad again by good; the labourer was thriftless in good fortune, and helpless when the wheel turned.

But whilst hunger was their master there would none  
of them chide,  
Nor strive against the statute however sternly he  
looked.  
But I warn you, workmen, win money while you may,  
For hunger hitherward hasteth him fast;  
He shall awake with the water floods to chastise the  
wasteful,<sup>1</sup>

But the decade which preceded the Peasants' Eising was, on the average, one of high wages and low prices.<sup>2</sup> No doubt the war taxation that culminated in the poll-taxes pressed heavily on all, and very likely caused real distress in the opening years of Richard's reign ; but the labourers who rose in 1381 were men accustomed to very fair conditions of existence, and had therefore a very good opinion of themselves and of what was due to them. This status they had won in the teeth of constituted authority, in defiance of Parliaments, landlords, justices of the peace, and sheriffs. It was the result in many cases of a nomad life, in others of illegal

<sup>1</sup> P. PZ., B, vi. 309-24.

\* Bogers, i. 270.